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ABSTRACT

This guide presents ideas for staff development for managers who work with young or entry-level workers in small businesses. The guide is designed to help managers (1) get new workers to do their jobs well consistently; (2) devise a plan of action that will broaden the worker's job skills; and (3) evaluate the worker's progress to spot problems and improve performance. The guide uses case studies to illustrate the points of worker development strategies. Key points are summarized at the end of the booklet, and a review quiz with answers is provided. A list of suggested resources completes the guide. (KC)

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Moving Along

Developing Competent Workers

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Moving Along

Developing Competent Workers

the **Work Force** series
for small businesses

The National Child Labor Committee
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This guide was created by the National Child Labor Committee in cooperation with the Colorado Alliance for Business, the New York Private Industry Council, and the Hartford Area Private Industry Council under grants from the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, the Ford Foundation, Morgan Guaranty Trust Company of New York, Avon Products, and the New York Community Trust.

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What This Guide Will Help You Do More Effectively

- Get new workers to do their jobs well consistently.
- Devise a plan of action that will broaden the worker's job skills.
- Evaluate the worker's progress to spot problems and improve performance.

CASE STUDY

I Want To Be An Executive Secretary

Ann Reid, a recent high school graduate, was hired as a typist and file clerk for an insurance company. She was bright and ambitious, and her supervisor, Mina Martinez, knew she would be a valuable employee for the company.

When Mina hired her she had explained to Ann that her duties would involve relief typing and maintaining the files, but that eventually Ann would be trained as a secretary for one of the partners. Ann was excited at the prospect. "I have always wanted to be an executive secretary," she said, "I will do a super job so that you will want to move me up real quickly."

"Being an executive secretary requires a lot of skills, and organization, Ann," Mina replied, "It also requires that you know a lot about the company and that you learn about the kind of insurance policies we underwrite. I think you are bright and that you will be able to master all of that, but it will take time. Once you get the basics of the typing and filing down, I'll start to show you some of the other things you'll need to know. In the meantime, let's take things one step at a time."

Ann turned out to be just as good an employee as Mina had anticipated. Her work was completed quickly and accurately and she was well liked by her coworkers. Mina wanted to tell her that she was doing a good job, so at the end of the first month asked her to come into the office to talk about her progress.

At the meeting Mina complimented Ann on her work. She told Ann the things she did well and discussed the areas where she needed more training. She asked Ann if there were any problems she wanted to discuss.

"Yes," said Ann, "You said that I could move up to executive secretary in time. I have been doing a real good job and have learned about the company and about insurance policies. I am ready to move up. When can I have an executive secretary's job?"

"Are you nuts? You have only been working for a month!" Mina said, astonished. "We don't have any openings for executive secretaries anyway. Agnes doesn't retire for two years yet, and that was the position I was thinking of for you. That's a long way down the road. You should know better. If you don't want the job you have now, there are plenty of good people out there who will."

Most employers expect to have to teach a young worker to do the job when they hire him or her. That is, they understand from the beginning that part of their concern is going to be *worker development*. The good news is that when you hire a young person, you are probably starting with good material.

Young people usually come to their jobs with a lot of enthusiasm: They want to do a good job. For the most part young people understand that they will need to learn the job and are eager to do so. They are as anxious to succeed as you are.

Unfortunately, most small business operators don't have the time to think much about worker development: Young people learn to do their jobs as they go along in a catch-as-catch-can manner. The problem with this is not only that the young people frequently have gaps in learning that cost you time and money, but they frequently become disillusioned and dissatisfied because they don't know what to expect. And dissatisfaction leads to worker turnover and higher costs for you.

Planning worker development can save you time and money by making sure that your expectations and the worker's expectations are the same.

Your plan of action for teaching a new worker the job is a *development plan*. A development plan is a simple way to make an employment road map, so that both you and the new worker will know where you are going and how you will get there.

In the case study at the beginning of the section, Mina and Ann could have avoided the confrontation if Ann had had a clearer idea of what Mina meant. Similarly, if Mina had had a plan by which to measure Ann's progress, she would have had an easier way to convey to Ann how much she had learned and how much further she had to go. As it was, Mina's response seemed arbitrary to Ann, who didn't understand why a month — which seemed like a very long time to her — wasn't a very long time to be on the job. In short, a development plan would have prevented the problem by crystallizing Ann's and Mina's expectations in the same place.

The first step toward making a development plan is to decide what you want from the worker over the long term. What role do you ultimately want this person to take in the company? Do you want this worker for only this job, but not for any other? Is this job a stepping stone to another in your company?

Answering these questions is one way of identifying your own expectations for the worker. Let the worker know what your answers are: If you don't envision moving the worker to a position of greater responsibility, say so. The worker is entitled to know where he or she stands from the beginning. On the other hand, if you have hired the worker with an eye toward a more responsible job in the future, say that too. Knowing that he or she has a chance to move up will motivate the worker to learn more quickly.

Once you have decided what you want for this worker over the long term, then you need to decide how you will get there.

This is the development plan. It should contain all of your thinking about how you are going to teach the worker the job, including the order in which you are going to approach each aspect of the job. If, for example, you run a dry cleaning store, you will need to decide whether you want the new worker to learn pressing and then spot removal or whether he or she should start out on the cash register instead.

A development plan is more thinking than anything else: you don't need to spend a lot of time writing an elaborate plan of action. Just think through the process that will get you and the worker toward your long-term goal. That way you and the worker will both have the same expectations and no one will be disappointed.

Why bother? First, if you want the new worker to do the job well, you will have to train him or her. A development plan will help you direct your efforts to the places where it will do the most good. Second, dissatisfied employees cost you money because they are seldom very productive and have high rates of absenteeism. And unrealistic expectations are the chief cause of dissatisfaction among young workers. When you have a clear tool for setting realistic expectations for young workers, you are better equipped to deal with the problem — and to cut costly turnover.

How to Plan Worker Development

1. **Set the standards you want the young worker to meet.**
2. **Plan to move the young worker toward your goal by using benchmarks with which you can measure the worker's progress.**
3. **Evaluate the worker's progress according to the benchmarks in your plan.**
4. **Plan for the future.**

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Here is the way that Mina could have prevented the problems from starting:

Ann

I have always wanted to be an executive secretary. I will do such a super job that you will want to move me up quickly.

Mina

I know you're going to do a good job, Ann, but being an executive secretary is a big job. It takes a lot of skills that you haven't had a chance to learn yet. For example, you have to be able to type 70 words a minute and take dictation at 120 words a minute. You have to be able to organize the partner's schedule and coordinate work among her assistants. That means that you will have to learn how all of the departments in the company work. And most important, you will have to take a course in business liability insurance so that you can understand the policies and how they are written. I think you can do all of that, but being an executive secretary is a long-term goal. There won't be an opening in this company until Agnes retires, and that is in two years.

In the meantime, though, you can work at developing those skills I just talked about. By the time Agnes has retired you will be ready to fill her shoes. The way we will do that is one step at a time. As you learn new things, you will be given more responsibility. How does that sound to you?

Ann

It sounds like a long time to me. I really want to learn though.

Mina

It isn't very long at all when there is so much to learn. We'll start by working on your typing speed and on the filing. Learning the filing system is a good way

to learn how the whole company works, and typing policies is a good way to start learning how to read them. Why don't we sit down tomorrow morning and make a plan of how you will go about learning the skills you need. That way we will both know where we are going and how long it will take to get there.

Ann

That sounds good to me. I would like to know what's ahead.

Step 1: Set Standards

Before you can begin to train a new worker you need to make some decisions about what role you want the worker to fill in your company. That is, you need to ask yourself, "What do I want this worker to be doing over the long term?" These are basic *employment goals* and your decisions about them will affect the way you approach the new worker.

Employment goals involve issues like these:

- **Will there be an opportunity for this worker to move up in the company?**
- **Is this a permanent position or a temporary job?**
- **How long do you expect this worker to stay with the job if there is no opportunity for advancement?**

Employment goals tell you something about your long range hopes for the employee. Make sure that you let the worker know what your goals are: It is unfair and irresponsible to let a new worker think there will be an opportunity to move up when there won't be. If you hire a youth to sweep floors and that is all he or she will ever be doing, *say so.* Don't give a new worker false hopes: He or she is entitled to know what you have in mind.

Employment objectives, on the other hand, tell you about the tasks you want the worker to be able to do in his or her present position. These objectives help you measure how much work should be done and how well it should be done. Your objectives should also include an estimate of how long it will take the worker to learn the job. For example, Mina could have made this one of her objectives for Ann:

> By the end of the sixth month of employment be able to type 55 words per minute with no more than three errors per page.

Your objectives should include all of the duties that make up the worker's present job. For each of the responsibilities you should have a good idea of how to measure success: What does the worker have to do in order to be doing the job satisfactorily? How much work should be done? What level of quality do you expect?

The answers to these questions will help you come up with some clear ways to tell a worker what you expect on the job. When you do that, both you and the worker will understand whether the job is being done properly or not. Most important, you and the worker will be working with the same expectations: one of you won't think that planting 50 feet of hedges a day is a good day's work while the other thinks it takes 100 feet a day to do a good job.

Objective Number One: Responsible Work Behavior

Every employer expects a new worker to follow the work rules from the first day. Unfortunately, few young people know what proper work behavior is. If they have never worked before, they may assume that whatever behavior is tolerated at school or at home is O.K. For most businesses, it isn't. Even when young people have some work experience, they don't automatically know what you expect from a worker: not every business has the same rules.

Don't assume that young people know how to act at work. Tell them clearly what you expect and what the consequences will be if rules are broken.

Tell young workers the rules as soon as they start on the job. Ask questions to make sure that they understand. Rules for young people should be the same as the rules for adults. Make a point to enforce them consistently as well: if you fail to act when one person breaks a rule and then discipline someone else for doing the same thing, you will seriously undermine your ability to get the kind of performance you want.

Finally, give feedback frequently. Make a point not to let poor behavior slip by, but at the same time remember to recognize good behavior too. Positive reinforcement is always the best teacher. Tell a worker when a job is done well. If your workers consistently come in on time and work hard, say so. All workers need to hear that they do something well occasionally.

In the long run, young workers will learn more about work behavior from what you do than from what you say. Set a good example and the young people you employ will follow it. If you take young workers' jobs seriously and treat their work as important, they will too. And if they think their jobs are worthwhile, they will take care to do them very well.

Step Two: Set Benchmarks

Once you know where you want your new employee to be, you need to determine the best way to get there. The best approach is to break the job into tasks first. For example, if you hire a young man who will be trained as a secretary, the job can be broken into these tasks:

- Answering the phones,
- Maintaining the files,
- Typing correspondence and reports,
- Scheduling appointments,
- Operating teletype equipment.

Once you have broken the job into tasks, put them in the order in which you will teach them. A good rule of thumb is to proceed from the least complicated jobs to the most complex ones.

After you have decided the order of the tasks, estimate how much time the worker will need to learn each part. When you have put the time with the tasks, you will have a complete development plan which will set out clearly what you expect from the new worker.

Use the development plan as a contract between you and the worker. Discuss your intentions with the worker and agree on what the two of you will accomplish and how long it will take. That will ensure that both of you have the same expectations: the youth will know what is expected of him or her and you will know how long it will take to get the worker competent at the job.

As the worker learns new skills, begin to set new goals. You may want to work toward higher productivity in the tasks the worker currently performs or add new tasks altogether. Keep reviewing the development plan so that the worker always has a clear goal to work toward — and clear expectations about the job.

Step Three: Evaluate Progress

Evaluating performance and determining progress is a continuing process. You probably do this as you work without even thinking about it. If you evaluate a worker's performance in a more systematic, planned manner regularly — for example, every month or quarterly — you can use evaluation as a tool to increase productivity. You can help a worker feel positive about the progress he or she has made by saying what is being done well and where improvement is needed.

A performance evaluation is a good opportunity to:

- **Measure performance and development;**
- **Improve communications;**
- **Work out solutions to problems.**

With young people, the primary emphasis in evaluation is to bring them up to the performance you expect from experienced workers.

Observe and Evaluate

As you work with the employee, you will notice instances where he or she performs very well or performs badly. Make a note of both from time to time so that you will have specifics to talk about when you meet with the worker. Saying "You're late too much" isn't nearly as saying "You are always late on Thursday mornings. Why?" At the same time make a note of places where the worker is having trouble doing certain parts of the job; these problems usually point to a need for more training.

Compare the behavior you observe on the job to the behavior you want. Is the worker where he or she should be according to the development plan? Has the worker met the standards you have agreed on for this period? Compare the worker's performance with the development plan point by point.

Certain factors may consciously or unconsciously influence your judgment about the worker. Try to eliminate them when you consider a worker's performance. These factors are:

- Single instances of high performance (especially *recent* instances), poor performance, or an error that may overshadow the real level of perforance.
- Your reluctance to say something unfavorable in an evaluation. Consider the person's feelings to be sure, but if criticism is needed give it in a constructive way.
- Hurrying through the evaluation. Take a little time to do a thorough job.
- Inadequate or incorrect information. Don't evaluate without *all* the facts.

Discuss the Evaluation with the Young Worker

Discuss performance with young workers from time to time so they will know their work exceeds, meets, or falls below each requirement and how they are doing over all.

Why make a point to meet when you already do this on a day-to-day basis? Because workers often have things on their minds that they can't express in casual conversations. These discussions save time — and therefore money — in the long run by cleaning up uncertainties that can cause problems.

A performance evaluation is a good time to get the things which are bothering you out in the open. Be specific and try to get the worker to be specific.

Most important, don't find the worker unsatisfactory. If anything is unsatisfactory it is the behavior, the performance, or the work product.

Work for agreement. Be patient. Listen. Explain. Discuss. Treat the young worker as an adult — but be more considerate and patient than you would be with an old hand.

When you meet with a worker to discuss performance and plans for learning new tasks, there are a number of things you can do to make it easier on both of you:

- **Meet in private.** Choose a place where your conversation won't be overheard or disturbed.
- **Put the youth at ease.** Be relaxed yourself, and explain that the purpose of the discussion is to help him or her improve on the job.
- **Mention a few strong points.** Tell the youth what is being done well.
- **Encourage the youth to talk.** Ask questions to get the conversation going.
- **Listen** carefully.
- **Discuss areas where improvement is needed.** This is not the time to dwell on minor incidents or get into arguments. Help the youth see where more effort is needed.
- **Encourage the youth to help plan future development.** Have the youth think up ways to make better use of strong points.

Take Appropriate Action

Evaluations are useful only if you take action to bring about improvement. The need for training, coaching, and assistance doesn't go away because you have worked out a development plan. Do whatever you agreed to do in as short a time as possible. If you set an example by showing respect for the plan, the employee will work harder to accomplish the objectives.

When you put a development plan to work, the greatest help you can give is through timely, accurate feedback. Stress the youth's progress toward your goals.

CASE STUDY

Mail Clerk

Sally Gallagher, an office supervisor for a clothing manufacturer, met with Jim Brown, a young worker, to discuss changing his job from file clerk to mail clerk. She and Jim agreed to the following objectives and work assignments:

1. By the end of the first week Jim will know all the pick-up and delivery points in the office.
2. He will make two rounds a day starting at 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. from the mail room. Each tour will take about one hour.
3. Jim will spend three hours a day helping Robert Silver and learning how to sort incoming mail.
4. He will spend two hours a day helping Robert sort, stamp, and deposit outgoing mail.
5. At the end of the third week, he will take over both of these operations from Silver, and continue to pick up and deliver the mail.

After one month on the job, Jim was scheduled to discuss his performance evaluation with Sally. He was handling the mail all right, but he was anxious because he had been late a number of times. He wasn't sure how Sally would react to that.

Sally was also not sure how to deal with Jim. He had been late four mornings out of five for the last week. However, the mail pick-ups and deliveries were on time, even on the days Jim came late. Also, Jim was very pleasant to work with.

List the strengths and weaknesses of each of the following approaches:

1. Sally should tell Jim how disappointed she is that he is not coming to work on time.
2. Sally should talk about the importance of getting to work on time.
3. Sally should point out the problem and then work together with Jim to find a solution to his tardiness.
4. Sally should tell Jim how pleased she is with the way he handles the mail.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

1. Telling Jim that she is dissatisfied with him will not motivate him to do better. It may have the opposite effect by making him defensive. This approach ignores his good performance.
2. Jim is not anxious about coming late, but about how Sally will react. This approach also does not recognize Jim's good performance.
3. This approach involves both Sally and Jim in the process of changing behavior. A commitment by Jim based on his own perception of the problem will be stronger than one based on Sally's threat. A disadvantage is that Jim may not really participate. Carrying this off calls for considerable ability on Sally's part.
4. This is good positive reinforcement for the work performance, but it may lead Jim to believe that as long as he gets his work done, he can come in any time he wants.

- It is profitable for your company to make young workers productive. Not every job provides an opportunity to acquire significant new skills, but every job provides opportunities to learn responsible work behavior.
- One way to increase competence is to plan a sequence of tasks and jobs which moves from the simple to the more complex. This will help you both plot a course of growth toward increased competence and help you organize and control the flow of work.
- Plan worker development by:
  1. Setting the standards you want the young worker to meet.
  2. Planning to move the young worker toward your goal by using benchmarks with which you can measure the worker's progress.
  3. Evaluating the worker's progress according to the benchmarks in your plan.
  4. Planning for the future.
- The purpose of a performance evaluation is to improve performance and plan for the future. Discuss young workers' performance with them from time to time so that they will know whether they are meeting work standards.

Review

Check the correct answers.

1. A development plan will help you and the young worker focus on where you are going and how you will get there.

   ☐ True ☐ False

2. A development plan should include your ideas on how you are going to teach the worker the job, including the order in which you are going to approach each aspect of the job.

   ☐ True ☐ False

3. Employment goals and employment objectives are the same thing.

   ☐ True ☐ False

4. Performance evaluation can increase a worker's productivity by:
   A. Making the worker feel positive about his or her progress.
   B. Pointing out where the worker needs to improve.
   C. Making a worker see how much harder he or she has to work to come up to standard.

5. Recent, single instances of high performance or poor performance, or a serious error should be given a great deal of weight when evaluating an employee.

   ☐ True ☐ False

6. A performance evaluation is an opportunity to:
   A. Meet in private.
   B. Measure performance and development.
   C. Help youths develop good work habits.
   D. Improve communications.
   E. Tell the youth why you can't give him or her a raise.
   F. Work out solutions to problems.

7. One way to increase competence is to plan a sequence of tasks which move from the simple to the more complex.

   ☐ True ☐ False

8. You can't teach a youth good work behavior.

   ☐ True ☐ False

9. The purpose of a performance evaluation is to improve performance and plan for the future.

   ☐ True ☐ False

10. Development plans should be revised as the worker learns new skills.

    ☐ True ☐ False

Review Analysis

1. True.	3. False.	5. False.	7. True.	9. True.
2. True.	4. A and B.	6. B, D, and F.	8. False.	10. True.

RESOURCES

If you want more information, you will find these books valuable.

Kenneth Blanchard, Ph.D., and Spencer Johnson, M.D. *The One Minute Manager* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982)

A guide to increasing productivity and getting results from the people you manage.

Daniel Druckman, Richard M. Roxella, and James C. Baxter. *Nonverbal Communication: Survey, Theory and Research* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1982)

This book discusses the relationship between verbal and nonverbal behavior and the effects of cultural and personality differences on behavior.

William L. Siegel. *People Management for Small Business* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1978)

A guide on finding the right employee, planning a training program, communications, motivation, and evaluating employees. This is one of a series of books from this publisher geared to small business owners.

Thomas L. Moffatt. *Selection Interviewing for Managers* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1979)

An in-depth explanation of the interview and selection process from where to look for candidates through making a final decision.

John P. Wanons. *Organizational Entry: Recruitment, Selection, and Socialization of Newcomers* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1980)

A how-to-guide on matching the individual wth the job and the organization.

William H. Mobley. *Employee Turnover: Causes, Consequences, and Control* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1982)

This covers how to analyze employee turnover rates, determine the cause and the costs of turnover, and methods for reducing it.

Gordon F. Shea. *The New Employee: Developing a Productive Human Resource* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1981)

This covers task analysis, on-the-job training, and increasing productivity.

Paul Preston. *Employer's Guide to Hiring and Firing: Strategies, Tactics, Legal Considerations* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1982)

In addition to basic interviewing skills, this book deals with techniques on managing interpersonal conflicts, counseling the problem employee, and firing an employee.

The National Child Labor Committee is the nation's only private, non-profit organization which devotes a full program to the critical problem of youth employment. Run by business and voluntary leaders for more than eighty years, the Committee promotes education, training, and job opportunities for youth which are geared to the needs of the nation's businesses.

If you want more information about the Committee or its programs, write us at 1501 Broadway, New York, New York 10036.